

More than half of couples preparing for marriage are cohabiting

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If you prepare couples for marriage, it isn't very long until you find that many of them are cohabiting. Sister Barbara Markey has a videotape and study guide—available from Archdiocesan Center Library—about cohabitation. This is part of FOCCUS at Creighton University.

Below is a summary from “Preparing Cohabiting Couples for Marriage.”

Introduction

- About 50 to 80% of couples coming for marriage are living together.
- Their divorce rate is about 50% higher than those who do not cohabit before marriage.

Background Information

- About 53% of first cohabiting unions result in marriage, 37% dissolve, and 10% continue.
- Low levels of religious importance/participation are related to higher levels of cohabitation.
- There is no difference in cohabitation by religious denomination.

Reasons for Cohabitation

- Changing values on family and decline in importance of marriage
- Declining confidence in the guidance of religious and social institutions.
- Marriages being delayed for economic and sociological reasons while sexual relationships begin earlier (85% of unmarried youth are sexually active by age 20).

Individual Reasons

- Desire for economic security or economic independence.
- Seek stability for raising children (40% of cohabiting relationships have children).
- Use as a sign of independence.
- Use as rite of passage, stage of personal development.

Cohabitors and Marriage

- Cohabitors who divorce break up early in the marriage.

Risk Factors for Cohabitors Who Marry

- Cohabitors as a general group are less committed to the institution of marriage and more accepting of divorce,
- Cohabitation is more like dating than marriage.
- Women who cohabited are 3.3 times more likely to have a secondary sex partner after marriage than noncohabitors.
- Cohabitors tend to hold *individualism* as more important than noncohabitors do. Cohabitors value independence and economic equality in a relationship while married persons value independence and the exchange of resources.
- Cohabitors may allow themselves to marry because of pressure from families and friends or pressure to provide a stable home for children.

- Cohabitors as a group report *lower* satisfaction with marriage after they marry than noncohabiters. Couples may be going into marriage with unrealistic expectations of making the faulty assumption that they have worked through all future problems.
- Cohabitors, in general, are *less religious, more independent, more liberal in attitude, and more risk-oriented* than noncohabiters
- The experience of cohabitation *changes attitudes about commitment* and permanence in relationship and makes some persons more open to divorce.
- Cohabitors after marriage have more problems in relationship about money than do noncohabiters.
- *Domestic violence* occurs more often with cohabiting couples than with married persons. Cohabitors are likely to carry this pattern into marriage.
- Cohabitors who marry are less good at conflict resolution than those who do not cohabit.